Chapter 1

Scene Song: "Charley" ~ Firestarter Soundtrack

Friday morning in Pelmont arrived bright and soft, the sky already blue, the air clean, the world outside carrying that easy warmth that made even ordinary mornings feel a little touched by magic. At Jimmy's house, Sir Lord Jimmy Crystal was already awake. His routine, by now, had become nearly sacred: Up out of bed, shower, hair properly seen to, chains selected, rings on, black track suit pants with the white stripes down the sides, long-sleeved lightweight hoodie shirt, and then, as always, off to Sasha's house for cereal and Teletubbies. Because civilization depended on consistency. By the time Jimmy let himself into Sasha's house and made his way upstairs, the place was still quiet in that half-sleeping morning way. No coffee yet. No voices. No movement. He pushed open Sasha's bedroom door and looked in. She was still asleep. Jimmy paused in the doorway, took in the sight of her under the covers, dead to the world, and then gave the faintest little amused half smile, like: *Of course she is.*

He quietly stepped inside. Like a puppy discovering its owner was still asleep, he went straight to her nightstand, picked up the remote, slipped off his sneakers, and climbed onto the bed with casual familiarity. Then he stretched himself out at the bottom of it, lying crosswise near her feet like this was the most natural arrangement in the world. He clicked on the television to watch the *Teletubbies,* and immediately, peace was restored. Jimmy watched with total, serious attention, his head propped slightly against a pillow that was at the end of Sasha's bed, while Poe, Tinky Winky, Dipsy, and Laa-Laa committed their usual acts of brightly colored nonsense. Every now and then, a soft little laugh escaped him—that giddy, childlike laugh of his—but he kept it quiet so he wouldn't wake Sasha. At one point, Tinky Winky did something particularly ridiculous, and Jimmy softly whispered to the television:

"You magnificent purple bastard."

Then he lightly laughed again to himself. Then the episode ended. Jimmy turned the TV off, and the room fell quiet again. And, because he was warm, comfortable, and at the foot of Sasha's bed like some overgrown, ring-covered house pet, he promptly fell asleep.

Later that morning, Sasha came downstairs freshly showered and dressed, her hair done, her mind slowly waking the rest of the way as she moved into the kitchen to make coffee. The house smelled faintly of detergent, warm air, and the first promise of caffeine. She had just started fixing her cup when Kellie came over. The back door opened, and Kellie stepped in with her usual easy energy. Sasha smiled.

"Hey, Kellie," Sasha said.

“Hey,” Kellie greeted back.

Kellie came farther into the kitchen, and the two of them fell easily into laughter and conversation while Sasha fixed her a cup too. The whole thing had that relaxed, familiar feel of women who knew each other well enough not to need much effort to settle into each other’s company. At one point, Kellie leaned against the counter and said:

“I’ve been thinking.”

Sasha glanced at her with a smile while stirring sugar into her coffee.

“That’s dangerous.”

Kellie laughed.

“No, I’m serious. I think I want to attend Pelmont University.”

That made Sasha stop and look at her properly with a raised brow.

“Really?”

Kellie nodded, smiling now.

“Yeah. I want to take some writing classes.”

Sasha’s face lit up immediately.

“Oh, Kellie, that’s great.”

Kellie gave a little shrug, pleased but trying not to make too much of it.

“Yeah, I used to love writing when I was growing up, so…I don’t know. I think it’d be exciting.”

Sasha smiled warmly.

“I think you’d be a great writer.”

That made Kellie smile for real. Before she could answer, footsteps shuffled into the kitchen. Jimmy entered in all his morning-after-Teletubbies glory, looking comfortable and fully unbothered with life. His hair was still perfect, his rings and chains in place, his black track suit pants and lightweight hoodie fitting him like he’d been poured into casual vanity. Sasha looked at him and immediately laughed.

“So, you really went upstairs, climbed onto the bottom of my bed, watched Teletubbies, and then fell asleep there.”

Jimmy went straight to the coffee without shame.

“Aye,” he said with a half smile. “That’s textbook brother behavior.”

Kellie laughed. Jimmy reached for a mug.

“I was maintainin’ a peaceful domestic atmosphere,” he added. “You should be grateful.”

Sasha laughed and leaned against the counter.

“Did Kellie tell you she wants to attend Pelmont University?”

Jimmy shook his head while fixing his coffee.

“No.”

Kellie smiled at him.

“Yeah, I want to go, but first I’ve gotta take something called the SATs, and honestly, I don’t really know what those are.”

“The SATs are a widely used digital standardized test,” Sasha explained. “It’s a high-stakes test that’s designed to assess readiness for college in reading, writing, and math.”

Kellie nodded slowly.

“Okay.” Then she took her coffee and added, “Guess I need to head to the library and get a book on it so I can study.”

Jimmy, who had just taken his first sip of coffee, said:

“Is it really a high-stakes test?”

“Yeah,” Sasha said, nodding, “I’ve seen people down on Earth lose sleep over the stress of the SATs, it’s that intense.”

Jimmy smiles excitedly.

“I’m takin’ it too then,” Jimmy said, still smiling.

Kellie turned and looked at him like he had just announced he wanted to become a magician. Sasha laughed out loud.

“Really, Jimmy?” Sasha asked, smiling with a brow raised, “are you planning to go to Pelmont University too?”

“No,” Jimmy said, offended by the assumption that he needed a practical reason. “But already, I’m thinkin’ this isn’t just a test, it’s a fuckin’ coronation.”

Sasha and Kellie laugh.

“I’m going in there to show those pencil-pushers what a *true* mind looks like,” Jimmy said with his signature charming Sir Lord Jimmy Crystal smile. “I’m going to walk into that hall, finish the math in five minutes, and leave them all fuckin’ weeping in the wake of my genius! How’zat?!"

Jimmy laughed with giddy glee before taking a sip of his coffee. Kellie laughed.

“You are absolutely gonna turn it into a joke while I’m trying to take it seriously.”

Jimmy froze, then turned toward her with a hilariously offended gape.

“Hey!”

That made both women laugh harder.

“I fuckin’ resent that,” he said.

Then he lightly laughed too.

“I will not,” he said.

The way he said it made it obvious he absolutely would, at least a little. But then his tone shifted just enough to show he meant it.

“But no, seriously,” he said, “I want to take it.”

Kellie looked at him for a second, smiling now, and then nodded.

“Okay,” Kellie said, smiling, “you and I can take it together.”

“Good,” Jimmy said with a faint smile and a nod. “We can study together with some uh—colorful highlighters and shite? And maybe Remmick can play some—focusing music on his banjo while we work."

Kellie lightly laughed and shook her head. Sasha laughed into her coffee, then smiled and muttered under her breath while shaking her head:

“Oh, this is going to be hilarious,” Sasha said.

Jimmy, meanwhile, looked far too intrigued by the idea of a high-stakes academic test for anybody’s peace of mind. And in the bright Friday morning warmth of Sasha’s kitchen, with coffee in their hands and the day just beginning around them, the whole ridiculous thing had already started.

Scene Song: “Axel F” ~ Harold Faltermeyer

Pelmont Library was quiet in the way only libraries ever managed to be—soft footsteps, low voices, the faint hum of overhead lights, the occasional rustle of pages turning somewhere in the distance. Jimmy and Kellie came in through the front doors together, and from the second

they stepped inside, it became immediately clear that the two of them were approaching this SAT mission with wildly different levels of seriousness. Kellie was focused. Jimmy was… *present*, that was *not* the same thing. They moved through the aisles upstairs where the study and test-prep books were kept, Kellie scanning titles with purpose while Jimmy followed a step or two behind, his eyes lazily moving over the shelves like he was browsing a museum of potential mockery. Kellie ran one finger along a row of thick prep books.

"SAT, SAT, SAT…"

Jimmy, meanwhile, had already become distracted. He pulled one random book off the shelf, looked at the title, and frowned.

"**The Joy of Better Sex**," he read aloud in a low voice.

Then he looked at Kellie with a faint frown and a half smile.

"Good thing we don't need a fuckin' book to tell us about this shite anymore, yeah?"

Kellie laughed hard and playfully slapped his arm as he laughed too. Jimmy flipped it over once in his hand.

"I mean, imagine needin' literature for that. Deeply grim."

"Jimmy," Kellie said, laughing.

He slid the book back into place and immediately found another one. This one made him stop.

"**Harry Potter and the Culture of Fandom**."

He stared at it, then slowly turned his head toward Kellie and stared at her sourly.

"What the fuck is this?"

Kellie looked over now, smiling already because she could hear it in his voice. Jimmy held up the book.

"So there are people who looked at a boy with glasses fightin' evil and thought, *yes, let's academically unpack the social consequences of this shite*?"

Kellie laughed harder. Jimmy shook his head in disbelief.

"People really will intellectualize anythin' if you give 'em enough paper and emotional fuckin' instability."

He slid that one back too, then took two more steps and found yet another title. This time, he actually stopped and stared in sincere amazement.

"**How to Survive a Garden Gnome Attack**."

Kellie laughed immediately, the sound bouncing too loud for library standards before she slapped a hand over her mouth. Jimmy slowly pulled the book free and looked around like he needed confirmation that civilization had gone too far.

“No, hold on,” he said, faintly smiling.

He opened it and read one page, then looked at Kellie with genuine concern.

“This is either satire or a cry for help,” he said.

Kellie was bent over laughing now, trying desperately to keep it quiet. Jimmy held up the book.

“I need to know what kind of life leads a person to write this,” he added.

He squinted at the cover.

“And why does the gnome look fuckin’ smug? That’s what troubles me most.”

Kellie shook her head, still laughing. After another minute of Jimmy’s running commentary on the shelf offerings, Kellie finally smiled and looked at him sidelong.

“See?” she said. “I knew you wouldn’t take this seriously.”

Jimmy laughed and pressed the gnome book back onto the shelf.

“I *am* takin’ it seriously.”

The way he said it—full Sir Lord conviction, slightly offended, faint frown already appearing—made Kellie laugh again.

“No, don’t do that,” he said with a faint frown and a half smile. “I can be scholarly as fuck when the moment calls for it.”

“Mm-hmm,” she responded, smiling.

“I can.”

Kellie just shook her head, smiling, and continued down the aisle until she finally found what she was looking for.

“Here,” she said, pulling one SAT book free, then another, “these.”

Jimmy looked at the books in her arms and gave a faint frown.

“They look aggressive,: he said.

“They’re test prep books,” she replied.

“Aye,” he said. “Aggressive.”

A little later, they were upstairs in one of the back study rooms of the library, seated across from each other at a long wooden table near the windows. The room was quiet, mostly empty, and washed in soft daylight. A few other people were studying nearby, heads down, laptops open, pencils moving. Kellie had already opened one of the SAT prep books and was reading in earnest, while Jimmy sat opposite her with his own copy open in front of him, one hand propping up the side of his face. For the first five minutes, things went surprisingly well. Jimmy *actually read*. His eyes moved across the pages with more attention than Kellie had expected. He turned one page, then another, his brow faintly furrowed, his mouth occasionally twitching as if he were reacting privately to things, and then it started. He glanced up from the page and said quietly:

"Why's this math section written like it hates people?"

Kellie smiled without looking up. Jimmy went back to reading. Thirty seconds later:

"'Determine the author's intent.' My intent right now is to leave."

Kellie laughed under her breath. Jimmy kept going, another page, then:

"Why do they keep callin' these 'word problems' like that's fuckin' cute? These are literacy ambushes."

That made Kellie laugh again, but now she was trying to keep her focus. Jimmy flipped another page and lightly sucked his teeth.

"Oh, now they've brought geometry into it, cheap fuckin' move."

Kellie finally looked up.

"Jimmy."

He looked at her innocently.

"What?"

"I'm trying to study," she said.

"So am *I*."

"No, you're not."

Jimmy looked down at the book in front of him, then back at her with a faint frown and half smile.

"I *absolutely* am."

"You're making fun of the test."

"*That's* part of my process."

Kellie gave him a look.

“Can you please stop joking for like five minutes and *actually* study?”

Jimmy stared at her for one dramatic second, then sighed.

“Fine.”

He made a whole show of zipping his mouth shut with invisible fingers, locking it, throwing away the invisible key, and then folding both hands over his book like a schoolboy under direct supervision. That made Kellie laugh despite herself.

“There,” he whispered, “silenced by oppression.”

Kellie shook her head, smiling.

“Just read.”

Jimmy gave a solemn nod, and for a while after that, he actually did. The room settled, pages turned, pens scratched. Kellie became genuinely absorbed in the material. Jimmy remained quiet, reading with more focus than she’d expected him to have. Then, an hour had passed, Jimmy closed his SAT book, not softly but not loudly either, just with a decisive *thump* that made Kellie look up immediately.

“What?” she asked.

Jimmy leaned back in his chair and folded his hands over his stomach.

“I’m done.”

Kellie blinked.

“*What*?”

“I’m done studyin’,” he said.

Kellie stared at him.

“After just an hour?”

Jimmy’s faint frown returned at once, accompanied by that familiar half smile of self-satisfaction.

“Kellie,” he said, “I’m Sir Lord Jimmy Crystal.”

As if that explained literally everything. Kellie kept staring. Jimmy lightly tapped the closed SAT book with one ringed finger.

“I can pick up academics in an hour.”

She laughed once in disbelief.

“You cannot be serious.”

“I’m deadly serious,” he said, slowly smiling.

He leaned slightly forward now, warming to his own absurd confidence.

“My mind is beautifully erratic, but also, when required, sharp as fuck. I absorb. I retain. I conquer. That’s what I do.”

Kellie just slightly gaped at him. Jimmy gave a little shrug.

“Besides, this test’s all pattern recognition, reading, numbers, timing, and pressure. That’s basically just psychological fuckin’ combat with punctuation.”

Kellie laughed despite herself.

“You are *unbelievable*.”

“No,” Jimmy said, standing and straightening his hoodie, “I’m efficient.”

He tucked the SAT book under one arm, then set it down again when he remembered he wasn’t buying it, and looked at her.

“You leavin’ with me?” he asked.

Kellie immediately shook her head.

“No. I still have to study a lot more.”

Jimmy raised his brows with a surprised smile.

“A lot *more*?”

“*Yes*, Jimmy.”

Then she added, dryly:

“Because I actually want to *pass*.”

Jimmy laughed out loud at that. He shook his head, amused, and pointed at her once.

“That was rude,” he said.

“It was true,” she replied with a smile.

“Well, all right then. You enjoy your prolonged academic sufferin’. I’m goin’ home.”

He turned to leave, then turned and looked back at her.

“There’s a new episode of *The Power Rangers* on in an hour, and unlike you, I know how to prioritize.”

Kellie stared at him in disbelief. Jimmy smiled.

“Good luck, scholar.”

And with that, he walked out of the study room and down the hall, leaving Kellie sitting there at the table with her SAT book open, her pencil still in hand, and an expression on her face that hovered somewhere between bafflement, amusement, and the distinct suspicion that Sir Lord Jimmy Crystal had absolutely no idea how this was supposed to work. She looked down at her book, then toward the doorway he’d just disappeared through, then back at the book again, and all she could think was: *There is no way in hell this man is taking that test seriously.*

Chapter 2: Chapter Two

Scene Song: "Good Times" ~ Chic

A week later, it was test day. That morning, Sasha was already seated at her kitchen table, eating a bowl of Farina when Kellie came in through the back door, dressed sharply and neatly, looking polished in a way that said she had put genuine thought into the occasion.

Sasha looked up, smiled immediately, and said:

"Well, damn. You look nice this morning."

Kellie smiled, a little nervous but pleased.

"Thank you."

Before she could say more, Jimmy came in from the living room, where he had already been doing his usual morning routine of cereal and the day's episode of *Teletubbies*. He had on a

hoodie and sweatpants, comfortable and clean, his platinum hair in place, his rings on, his whole look relaxed in that very intentional Jimmy way.

He took one look at Kellie and briefly raised his brows. Then, with a half smile, he looked at Sasha and said:

“What’s this then? Are they judgin’ the SAT on appearance now?”

That made Sasha laugh.

“No,” she said with a shake of her head, “they only judge what’s on the test.”

Jimmy nodded as if he’d expected no less.

Then he darted his eyes back to Kellie and asked:

“Why then are you dressed like you’re about to go work for fuckin’ Mary Poppins?”

Kellie burst out laughing, and Sasha laughed too. Kellie smiled and lightly rolled her eyes.

“Shut up,” she said. “I just want to look nice for one of the biggest days of my life.”

Then she looked him up and down.

“Unlike you, who’s dressed like you’re going to teach high school gym.”

Jimmy let out this hilariously fake burst of offended laughter, then stopped, rolled his eyes at her with a smile, and shook his head.

“Oh, that’s rich. If I’m about to go ace a fuckin’ high-stakes academic test, I’m gonna do it in comfort. I’m not about to be mentally triumphant while my pants are fuckin’ tight and my soul’s distracted.”

That made both women laugh again. Kellie checked her watch, and her smile shifted into urgency.

“Okay. It's almost time, we'd better go now.”

Sasha stood up at once and walked them both to the door, in exactly the spirit she was in at that moment: a mother seeing her two mildly chaotic children off to something important. She hugged Kellie first.

“Do your best. Read carefully. Don’t rush. Breathe.”

Kellie laughed softly.

“I will.”

Then Sasha hugged Jimmy, and before she could even start, he was already smiling in amused expectation.

“Listen,” she said, holding his shoulders, “pay attention, read the questions all the way through, and don’t you sit there acting crazy—”

Jimmy laughed.

“Sasha, we’re takin’ the SAT’s, not goin’ to the Bone Temple while fighting the fuckin’ infected along the way.”

That made both Kellie and Sasha laugh. Sasha playfully smacked his arm.

“Jimmy!”

He laughed harder.

“What? I’m just sayin’, the level of concern feels *slightly* dramatic.”

He then wrapped his arms around her snugly and lay his head on her chest while making a playful, funny pouting expression.

“But I love your overdramatizing,” Jimmy said in a hilarious child-like voice, “it shows me you love me just as much as I love you.”

Kellie and Sasha laughed as Sasha hugged him and patted his head softly.

“Okay! Let’s fuckin’ go!” Jimmy said with full excitement and a smile as he released Sasha from the hug and lifted his head from her chest.

Sasha and Kellie laughed.

“Okay, have a good day, you two,” Sasha said, still in motherly protection mode.

Kellie nodded, and Jimmy gave her a little salute with two fingers, then the two of them headed out.

Scene Song: “Closing Time” ~ Semisonic

Pelmont High School looked bright and mildly intimidating in the morning sun, the front steps crowded with students and the halls full of test-day tension. Jimmy and Kellie made their way into the classroom where the SAT was being administered, and the second they stepped inside, Kellie’s face changed slightly. The room was almost filled with teenagers, rows and rows of them. Some looked nervous. Some looked half asleep. Some were already sitting with that grim, silent seriousness only big tests could create. Jimmy stopped in the doorway beside Kellie and looked around, then a slow smile spread across his face. In a low voice, he muttered:

“Shite, it smells like fuckin’ hormones and academic fear in here.”

Kellie let out a startled laugh, which she had to choke down immediately. Jimmy kept looking over the room.

“This is like a field trip to adolescent despair,” he added.

Kellie shook her head, smiling as they started down the aisle.

“Please behave.”

“Eh, maybe,” Jimmy said, shrugging with a faint smile.

At the front of the room stood Sasha’s Uncle Emmanuel, the test proctor for the day. He had the stack of tests in front of him and the slightly weary expression of a man who had explained standardized testing rules too many times in one lifetime. Kellie went first. He handed her a test packet, and she thanked him before going to sit in the second row. Then Jimmy stepped up. Emmanuel looked him up and down, from his tiara to his gold chains to his rings on both fingers, and raised a brow.

“Aren’t you a little too old to be taking the SAT?” he asked. “You look at least thirty.”

Jimmy frowned at him for half a second, laughed, and then gave him that signature charismatic Sir Lord Jimmy smile—that bright, edged, dangerous little smile that always made it clear he was about to say something outrageous and enjoy himself doing it.

“And you look like you’ve been personally offended by moisturizer for at least fifteen fuckin’ years, and yet here we both are,” Jimmy said lightly.

A couple of nearby students immediately looked up, trying not to laugh. Emmanuel just stared at him while handing him a test packet. Jimmy snatched the test packet from his hand and said with fake sweetness and emphatic clarity:

“*Thank* you.”

Then Jimmy rolled his eyes and turned away to go sit beside Kellie. Once everyone was settled, Emmanuel stood at the front and went through the rules.

“Alright, everyone, eyes on me for a moment,” Emmanuel said, clicking a pen and looking over a clipboard, “on your desk, you should only have your test booklet, your answer sheet, and an approved calculator. I have provided scratch paper; do *not* use your own. If you need more, raise your hand. I will post the start and stop times on the board behind me for each section, and I will alert you when five minutes remain.

Remember, once you finish a section or the time runs out, you must stop work *immediately*. You cannot go back to previous sections, and you cannot move ahead to the next one. We will have a scheduled ten-minute break after the Reading section and a five-minute break later in the test. During that time, you can have a snack or water outside the room, but you cannot access your phone. If you need to leave for an unscheduled break, the clock will not stop for you. Lastly, you are *not* allowed to discuss the test questions with *anyone*—not during the break and not while in the classroom. Get your pencils out, open your test booklets to section one, and begin.”

The room fell into that pre-test rustle of zippers, bags, pencils, and calculators. Jimmy reached down and unzipped his small backpack. From it, he pulled out a pencil pouch. Kellie, meanwhile, was already fumbling through her bag with a faint rising panic on her face. Jimmy looked over at her, then picked up the pouch and tilted it toward her with one of those ego-driven smiles that said he was about to enjoy being useful.

“You need a pencil?”

Kellie looked at him with raised brows and a surprised smile.

“You actually brought a pencil pouch with you?”

Jimmy laughed lightly.

“Aye,” he said. “When I take on somethin’, I take it on with full fuckin’ effort.”

That made her laugh. She took a pencil from his pouch, and Jimmy pulled one out for himself before zipping the pouch shut and sliding it back into his backpack. Then the test began, and the room went quiet—*real* quiet. Not the playful silence of a library or the soft quiet of a classroom before a lecture. This was sharp, concentrated quiet. The kind made of thought and pressure and the scratch of pencils moving fast over paper. At the front of the room,

Emmanuel had already given up any pretense of deep vigilance and was casually scrolling and texting on his phone.

Kellie stared down at her test packet with full concentration, brows drawn in, pencil moving, stopping, moving again. Beside her, Jimmy was a different person, no jokes, no theatrics, just a surprising, mechanical focus. While others were re-reading passages and biting their lips, Jimmy's pencil moved in a steady, rhythmic *scritch-scritch-scritch*. He didn't seem to be reading the questions so much as scanning for the logic and killing it. He flipped pages with a crisp, aggressive finality that made the students around him flinch. Thirty minutes in—less than halfway through the allotted time—Jimmy slammed his pencil down.

The sound crackled through the silent room like a gunshot. A dozen heads snapped up. Emmanuel looked up from his phone, scowling, and gestured sharply for Jimmy to keep it down. Jimmy gave a lazy, one-shouldered shrug that said: *Yeah, yeah. Sorry. Not really.* Then he leaned back in his chair, smiling, smug as hell. Kellie slowly darted her eyes up from her test and looked at him. Kellie mouthed at him: *You're finished already?* Jimmy slowly nodded and mouthed: *Yeah***.**

His face went serious for a second—that faint frown, that stillness, the expression that made him look absurdly certain of himself, then he silently laughed. The smile that followed was *pure* Sir Lord Jimmy Crystal satisfaction. Kellie just stared at him like: *What the hell?* Jimmy didn't even look at the test anymore. He just sat there in smug, terrible peace. He didn't check his work. He didn't look back at the pages. He just sat there in a state of terrible, smug peace, watching the clock tick for everyone else. After a few seconds, Kellie shook her head and let out the faintest, silent laugh before turning back to her own packet. Because whatever kind of deranged academic sorcery Jimmy Crystal was apparently operating on, she still had questions to answer.

Scene Song: "In the Meantime" ~ Spacehog

The kitchen was filled with the domestic hum of Sasha scrubbing dishes when Jimmy and Kellie burst in, holding two identical envelopes like they were unexploded bombs.

"Sasha! The scores are here!" Kellie shouted, her face a mask of terrified optimism.

Sasha dropped her sponge, her eyes lighting up.

"Oh wow, already? Awesome! Have you opened them yet?"

"No, we wanted to wait until we got here," Kellie said as she hopped on the counter of Sasha's island. Jimmy sauntered to the kitchen table and dropped into a chair. He looked entirely too calm, a faint smile on his face.

“I have to say,” he said, “I was fuckin’ shocked to see this shite in the mail. I was lookin’ at the envelope like—wait, you get a fuckin’ *score*? They actually grade you for sitting in a plastic chair for three fuckin’ hours? That’s fuckin’ knockout.”

He let out his usual, adorably childlike, giddy laugh as Kellie gave him a strained, half-smile before shaking her head. Sasha laughed along as she pulled up a chair.

“Okay, well, Kellie, you first,” Sasha urged.

With trembling fingers, Kellie sliced the envelope open, smiling. She stared at the paper for a long time.

“Twelve-seventy,” she whispered, her smile dropping for a few seconds.

“*Twelve-seventy*?!” Sasha exclaimed, clapping her hands and pulling Kellie into a massive hug. “Kellie, that’s incredible! You did amazing!”

“Yeah,” Kellie said, her smile not quite reaching her eyes.

Kellie was happy, but the perfectionist in her was already doing the math on the points she missed.

“I mean, it’s good. I just…I thought I’d break thirteen-hundred,” Kellie said.

“Girl, what? Twelve-seventy is amazing,” Sasha reassured her.

“Thanks,” Kellie sighed, though the dissatisfaction was written all over her face.

She turned her gaze to Jimmy.

“Alright, Sir Lord. Your turn. Let's see the damage.”

Jimmy looked at the envelope in his hand, his rings catching the kitchen light.

“Aye, well, let’s see how badly I’ve fucked this up. I probably bombed the fuckin’ thing, but I don’t care. I took it for the thrill, the danger, the *educational* brinkmanship.”

Kellie smiled.

“You probably did fail,” she said. “You barely studied.”

Sasha and Kellie shared a laugh as Jimmy tore the envelope open with zero ceremony. He squinted at the paper, his head tilting.

“Is a six-fifty good?” Jimmy asked, looking up at them, genuinely curious.

Kellie let out a short, cynical laugh.

“*Six-fifty*?! Jimmy, that’s your *total* score?!” Kellie exclaimed with a smile. “You need more than that just to get into a school that has ‘Trucking’ in the title!”

As Kellie laughed, Sasha shot Kellie a warning look.

“Kellie, be nice!” Sasha warned.

Sasha turned back to Jimmy, her voice softening to comfort him.

“It’s okay, Jimmy,” Sasha said. “The SATs aren't for everyone. You’ve got…other talents.”

Jimmy wasn’t listening. He was looking back at the paper, his brow furrowing as he pointed at a second number.

“Well, at least I got a six-seventy on this other part,” Jimmy said as he held up the results for them to see before lightly laughing.

Kellie’s smile faltered. She leaned in, her eyes scanning the page.

“Wait. What other part?” Kellie asked. “You said you got a six-fifty.”

“Yeah,” Jimmy said with a brow raised and a slight tilt of his head, “I got a sixty-fifty on the verbal and a six-seventy on the math.”
Jimmy once again holds up his results for Kellie and Sasha to see while smiling.

“Are you saying you got a thirteen-twenty total score?!” Kellie shouted with widened eyes.

Jimmy frowned at his results, confused for a few seconds before looking at her and smiling and saying:

“Uh—yeah, okay, yeah,” Jimmy said before laughing with Sasha.

“Jimmy, you got a six-seventy on the math, that’s amazing!” Sasha said before hugging him.

He laughed.

“Yeah, well, Kellie seems to be the fuckin’ math whiz,” Jimmy said with a half smile, “I mean, she figured out that thirteen-twenty business just like that.”

Jimmy and Sasha laughed.

“But wow,” he said, “thirteen-twenty? Shite, I guess I’m what? A fuckin’ scholar. I didn't even read half the stories in the first part—I just picked the answers that felt like they had the right *vibe*!”

Kellie just stared at the paper with pure, unadulterated fury.

“You *guessed*?!” Kellie shouted. “You *guessed,* and you *beat* me?! I studied for weeks, you studied for like an hour and *left* because *Power Rangers* was coming on!”

“In fairness, it was a new episode,” Jimmy said with a brow raised and a faint frown.

“That is *not fairness*!” Kellie shouted.

Now Sasha was laughing harder. Jimmy, meanwhile, looked back down at the score sheet like he wasn't entirely sure whether to be proud or alarmed.

"I genuinely thought I hadn't fuckin' done well," he admitted.

"Ugh!" Kellie yelled furiously. "This is unbelievable!"

Jimmy looked at her with an amused smile.

"Oh, calm down, Kellie, you got a 1270. That's still brilliant," Jimmy said. "Me, however—with me, this means that my mind's apparently got more goin' on in it than I thought. That feels like the sort of fuckin' information that comes with expectations attached."

Jimmy sighed and rolled his eyes.

"Shite," Jimmy said, "I liked it better when I could just be fuckin' decorative and volatile."

That got a small laugh out of Sasha.

"This is insane!" Kellie shouted. "I got beaten by a guy who thinks Tinky Winky should have his own damn *university*!

Sasha burst out laughing. Jimmy looked at Kellie with a slow, delighted smile.

"Well, first of all," he said, "Tinky Winky *should* have his own fuckin' university. Tinky Winky's clearly a visionary, emotionally stable, and dressed with more authority than half the academics in the world."

That made Sasha laugh harder. Kellie just gaped at him.

"*What*?!" Kellie said loudly. "No….no, I don't get it!"

Jimmy lightly laughed and looked down at his score sheet again, still deeply pleased with himself despite the existential ripple it had caused him. Kellie pointed between him and the paper in his hand.

"No. No, absolutely not," she said. "This makes *no* sense."

Then she turned sharply to Sasha.

"I want both of us to take the test again."

Jimmy looked up with a confused frown.

"What?" he responded.

Kellie pointed again, louder now.

"At home, with Sasha testing us."

Sasha blinked with a faint smile.

“You want a rematch?” Sasha asked.

“Yes!” Kellie said. “Because there is *no* way I am just accepting that Sir Lord Teletubbies over here beat me after an hour of studying and one episode of *Power Rangers* hanging over his head!”

“Sir Lord *Teletummies*?” Jimmy responded before letting out a child-like laugh.

Kellie ignored him and kept staring at Sasha.

“I’m serious!” Kellie shouted. “We do it again, at home, quietly, properly. No weird school energy, no distracted teenagers, no anything!”

Jimmy leaned back in his chair with a faint frown and half smile.

“This feels accusatory,” he responded.

“It *is* accusatory!” Kellie shot back.

Sasha, trying not to laugh, looked between them.

“You really want me to test both of you?”

“Yes!” Kellie said immediately.

Jimmy sucked his teeth and half smiled, amused.

“Well. Fine by me,” he replied.

He folded his arms and gave Kellie that bright, smug Sir Lord smile.

“I’ll happily crush your academic hopes a second time in a more intimate setting.”

That made Sasha laugh out loud. Kellie pointed at him.

“See?! This is exactly why we’re doing it again!” Kellie shouted.

Jimmy just laughed, and now the kitchen had gone from shock over the results to the very real possibility of a full-on rematch, which, frankly, was exactly the kind of absurd escalation Jimmy would’ve found fuckin’ glorious.

<u>Scene Song: “Born In The ‘80s” ~ Falcon Drives</u>

The rematch happened in Sasha’s kitchen. Sasha sat at the head of the table like a proper test proctor, armed with the SAT booklet, a pen, a timer, and the calm authority of somebody who already suspected this whole thing might get emotionally ridiculous before it was over.

Across from her sat Kellie and Jimmy. Kellie was focused from the second the test began—brows knitted, posture straight, pencil moving carefully but steadily, eyes fixed on the pages like she was personally going to drag justice out of the universe if she had to. Jimmy, meanwhile—just as before at Pelmont High, Jimmy's pencil moved in a steady, rhythmic scritch-scritch-scritch.

And just as before, he didn't seem to be *reading* the questions so much as scanning for the logic. His eyes moved fast. His page turns were crisp, almost aggressive. He'd finish a section, flip the page with this sharp little finality as if the test had personally offended him by not being harder. There was nothing sloppy about it either—no joking, no wandering attention, no distractions, just that same weird, undeniable focus Kellie had seen back at Pelmont High. Kellie noticed it too, and hated it. By the time they were done, Jimmy set his pencil down first again—this time with less drama, but with the exact same faint smugness simmering under the surface. Kellie finished a few minutes later, visibly determined to have beaten him this time or die trying. Sasha collected both tests and scored them at the counter while Jimmy and Kellie sat there in charged silence. Finally, Sasha looked up at Kellie first.

"Kellie," she said, smiling, "this time you got a 1350."

Kellie's whole face lit up.

"*Yes*!"

Kellie shot up in her seat with visible, triumphant joy.

"Justice *prevails*! Eat my *dust*, Sir Lord Teletubbies!"

Kellie laughed openly, gleeful victory. Jimmy raised a brow at her, faintly frowned, then scoffed, shook his head, and lightly laughed under his breath before giving her a half-smile that said she was absolutely doing too much. Sasha laughed.

"Well, you really shouldn't gloat, Kellie," Sasha said with a faint smile and a shake of her head.

Kellie, still riding the wave, asked while still smiling:

"Why?"

Sasha looked down at Jimmy's test, then back up.

"Well," Sasha said, "because—-I honestly don't know how to explain this rationally, but Jimmy got a total score of 1400."

"WHAT?!" Kellie shouted.

Jimmy's eyes widened, then, slowly, a smile spread across his face.

"1400?!" he repeated. "I did *better*! *Ugh*!"

He rolled his eyes with a faint smile, then slapped a hand to his own head.

“No!” Jimmy exclaimed. “It’s like my brain’s got a mind of its own. I don’t believe this is fuckin’ *happenin*’ to me!”

And then, because he was Jimmy, he got dramatically out of his chair, staggered one step, and dropped flat onto his back on the kitchen floor like the news had physically taken him out. Sasha burst out laughing. Kellie just stood there staring at him with wide-eyed shock and fury, then she looked at Sasha and said:

“You mean this giant human Teletubby on the floor here still did *better* than me?!”

Sasha, trying not to laugh harder, nodded helplessly.

“I’m afraid so,” Sasha responded.

“How?!” Kellie exclaimed, “at least I studied, but he didn’t even study! He didn’t even get past the fuckin’ third *grade*! So how could he have higher test scores or high test scores period knowing he didn’t study and didn’t even get past third grade because of the fuckin’ rage virus!”

“Well, Kellie,” Sasha said with a slight shake of her head and a faint smile, “I—

Kellie’s outrage peaked instantly.

“Well, who cares about this dumb fuckin’ test anyway?!” Kellie interrupted.

And with that, she stormed out of the kitchen and out of the house. Jimmy, still lying on the floor, sat halfway up and called after her:

“Oh, sure! How d’you think I fuckin’ feel?! I’m the one who’s now stuck bein’ a fuckin’ astrophysicist or a sinister little fuckin’ math wizard!”

That made Sasha laugh even harder. Jimmy groaned, shook his head, and dropped flat back onto the floor with a loud, put-upon sigh.

“For fuck’s sake…” Jimmy said in a low voice.

Scene Song: “Didn’t Cha Know” ~ Erykah Badu

A few minutes later, Jimmy stepped out onto Sasha’s front porch. The afternoon was bright and warm in that easy Pelmont way, quiet except for birds somewhere in the distance and the faint shifting of palm fronds in the breeze. On the porch swing sat Kellie. The second she saw him, she turned her face away and wiped quickly at the tears streaming down it. Jimmy’s expression changed immediately. He walked over and sat down beside her on the swing, quieter now, no swagger in the movement this time. For a second, he just sat there, then he asked:

“How are you?”

Kellie let out a sharp, angry breath through her nose and didn’t look at him.

“How do you *think* I am?”

Jimmy waited. Kellie looked at him, her eyes wet and furious.

“Your stupid scores both times mean I’m dumb and you’re smart,” Kellie said.

Jimmy’s face softened at once. He turned a little toward her and said in that low, exasperated, expletive Jimmy way:

“Oh, don’t start that shite.”

Kellie looked away again.

“No, I’m serious.”

Jimmy frowned faintly.

“Kellie, that does *not* mean you’re dumb,” he said as he gave a little shake of his head. “Do you actually think I’d be in a fuckin’ relationship with some dumb chick?”

That got her attention. She looked at him. Jimmy kept going, earnest but still himself:

“What the fuck would I do with a dumb girlfriend? Sit around all day explainin’ basic thoughts? That would be fuckin’ exhaustin’.”

That made her laugh through the tears, whether she wanted to or not. Jimmy’s face softened more when he heard it. Kellie wiped at her face again. Jimmy leaned his elbows on his knees and looked out ahead for a second before speaking again.

“You should be proud of both your scores,” he said, “the first one and this one.”

Kellie looked at him skeptically. Jimmy glanced over at her.

“No, I mean it,” he said, “the way I’m proud of mine and yours.”

That made her pause. Jimmy looked down at his hands.

“For twenty-eight years,” he said, quieter now, “I thought deep down, in private, that I wasn’t actually that smart.”

Kellie’s anger eased a little at once. Jimmy let out a dry little laugh.

“I thought I was only gifted because of Satan talkin’ to me. Or what I *thought* was Satan talkin’ to me. I thought every clever thing in me was borrowed from somethin’ dark, not mine, not real.”

Kellie stared at him now.

“So finding out through those scores that I’m not dumb,” he said, “that I’m actually smart as fuck—I have to admit, yeah, it does feel pretty fuckin’ good.”

His mouth pulled into a faint, serious half-smile.

“Especially when back on Earth, I felt like less than nothin’.”

That landed hard between them. Jimmy turned fully toward her then.

“But me scoring higher doesn’t mean I’m better than you. It’s just fuckin’ test scores. All they do is let me know that I’m not a nothin’ and that I’ve got a proper mind in here,” Jimmy said as he tapped the side of his head once.

“And so do you,” he added.

Kellie’s eyes filled again. Jimmy’s voice softened further.

“We shouldn’t be in competition with each other,” he said, “we should both be proud of each other.”

She looked down, then back at him, and tears started slipping again, slower this time. Jimmy lifted a hand and gently wiped them away with his thumb, his face softening into that signature charming smile of his—the one that still had all the Sir Lord confidence in it, but none of the danger anymore. Then he leaned over and kissed her gently on the lips. When he pulled back, Kellie was smiling through her tears.

“You’re right,” she said softly. “I am proud of you.”

Jimmy smiled more.

“I’m proud of you too.”

They sat there for one more second under the porch light and in silence. Then Jimmy stood and held a hand out to her.

“Come on,” he said.

Kellie took it and stood with him. Jimmy slipped an arm briefly around her shoulder and squeezed once.

“Sasha said she’s makin’ her famous banana pudding to celebrate,” he said. Then, with a faint frown and half-smile: “And that is not a culinary event I’m prepared to miss. That banana pudding’s fuckin’ dangerous.”

Kellie laughed. Jimmy glanced at her with a faint frown and a half smile.

“I’m serious. I’d fight anyone over the last spoonful,” he said.

That made her laugh harder, and with that, the two of them headed back inside together—lighter now, calmer, side by side. And in the strange, beautiful afterlife of Pelmont, where lost

people got second chances and broken ones sometimes discovered whole new pieces of themselves, Sir Lord Jimmy Crystal ended one more chapter of his story the same way he had begun to live the rest of his life: not in fear, not in shame, but in the growing, undeniable knowledge that there had been far more inside him all along than the darkness on Earth had ever let him believe.